



Henri Jules Jean Geoffroy dit Geo
1853-1924

Schoolchildren on July 14th
Oil on canvas / signed lower left
Dimensions : 46 x 61 cm
Dimensions : 18.11 x 24.02 inch

Biography

A son of a tailor of the Charente area and of a mother from Scottish origin, Jean Geoffroy settled in Paris at the age of eighteen. He studied under the tutoring of the lithographer and painter Eugène Levasseur. The latter encouraged him to enter the School of Fine Arts, where he studied in Bonnat's studio from 1871. He also worked with the painter and decorator Emile Adam. But two important encounters mostly determined his artistic career and his subject choice. When he arrived in Paris, Geoffroy lived at a couple of teachers', the Girard, who made him discover the world of school and childhood. From this moment, he devoted most of his work to these two themes.

His vocation was confirmed in 1876, when the artist met Pierre-Jules Hetzel, the famous editor of Balzac, George Sand, Victor Hugo and Jules Verne. Indeed, Hetzel made his fame and gave him help and affection. He commissioned him with many illustrations of children's books, next to Gustave Doré, Gavarni and Grandville, and that assured him from that time a regular income.

Geoffroy also exhibited at the Salon of Paris, then at the Salon of French Artists from 1874 until his death in 1924. He became a member of the latter in 1883 and rapidly knew success, with the public as well as with the specialists and the press, who praised his works in every exhibition. He was awarded a honorable mention in 1881 for "La Petite Classe" (Birmingham Museum), then he obtained a third class medal in 1883 for "Les Infortunés", which was bought by the State. Nominated Hors-Concours in 1886 for "Les Affamés" (Trieste Museum), Officer of the Academy in 1885, he received the Legion of Honor in 1897. At the Exposition Universelle of 1900, he received a gold medal for his "Sortie d'école à l'école maternelle". He also exhibited in the Parisian galleries, including Georges Petit. The ministry of Instruction Publique and Beaux-Arts gave him an official commission in 1893, regarding " five scenes of scholarly life ". Two of those scenes were held in Algeria, where Geoffroy travelled in 1894-1895, and one in Brittany. Geoffroy's paintings depicted most of the time children : at the childcare centre, the free clinic, the orphanage, the infant school, in primary school, professional school, high school, University, or at the puppet show, the market, in the street or in the factory. In 1890, he took part in the Childhood Exhibition in the Petit Palais, next to Eugène Carrière and Auguste Renoir, improving his renown as a " children painter ".

Indeed, Geo devoted his entire career in depicting children and lowly people that he had rubbed elbows with in the Belleville area, where he settled after having lived in the Girard's flat rue du faubourg du temple. Life in charitable institutions and the small world of school kids were for Geoffroy an endless source of inspiration. His paintings, drawings and etchings, which were instantaneous moments of the daily life in its most simple aspect, were a moving testimony of Paris during the third République and of the fight started by Jules Ferry to obtain education for everyone. The authorities, well-concerned by the creating of a non-religious and compulsory school, nominated Geoffroy " member of the Imagerie scolaire ", under the presidency of historian of art mister Havard, who helped him obtain numerous commissions.

Besides, the interest of the artist in the life of poor people and destitute of all kind interested the government in its commitment to the development of hospitals and charity work. This concordance between Jean Geoffroy's deep feelings and the social needs of the time as they were interpreted by the governments under the IIIrd République explained the great success he had in official spheres and the numerous honours he received. From 1883, Geoffroy headed toward a more important social reflection about the scholar milieu and his paintings became much more involved in the defence of Republican School. For example, in 1892, Geoffroy Leon Claretie's L'Université moderne, which was an apology of the republican school work from infant school to the Collège de France.

Museums

Amiens, Bayeux (Musée du Baron Gérard), Beaune, Cambrai, Clermont-Ferrand, Cholet, Dijon (Musée des Beaux-Arts), Lyon, Macon, Moulin, Nantes, Niort, Mulhouse, La Rochelle, Rouen, Paris (Musée d'Orsay), Rochefort, Saintes, Tourcoing, Vichy.

A l'étranger: Birmingham, Leningrad, Moscou, Trieste ainsi qu'au Brésil, Canada et aux Etats-Unis.

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